

In Parting Blow, Trump Administration Hits Again at Cuba

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

In a stunning announcement on January 11, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo communicated that “The State Department has designated Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism for repeatedly providing support for acts of international terrorism in granting safe harbor to terrorists.”

This additional U.S. insult to Cuba occurs with only a week remaining before President-elect Biden takes office. Many hope that Biden will restore openings to Cuba initiated by President Obama in late 2014 which the Trump administration trashed.

The U. S. government created its list of “state sponsors of terrorism” in 1979, adding Cuba in 1982. The Obama administration ended that designation in 2015. Re-assigned to the list, Cuba joins Iran, North Korea, and Syria. The U.S. classification of Cuba as a terrorist-sponsoring nation represents one element of U. S. aggression against Cuba that began more than 60 years ago as part of the Cold War.

Nations designated as sponsors of terrorism may expect “prohibition of U. S. arms exports and economic assistance,” controls over exports and services useful to terrorists or various militaries, and “imposition of miscellaneous financial and other restrictions.” The U.S. government uses this provision as one justification for its economic blockade against Cuba and for punishment of international banks and financial institutions dealing with Cuba.

Pompeo harked back to old pretexts for terrorist accusations against Cuba. He mentioned the presence in Cuba of three U.S. citizens charged with crimes in the United States and facing punishment. The most well-known of these persons is Black liberation fighter Assata Shakur.

Pompeo also referred to representatives of Colombia’s National Liberation Army (ELN) who remained in Cuba following the collapse of peace talks between that leftist insurgency and the Colombian government. He alleged that Cuban agents are instrumental in helping Venezuelan President Maduro “maintain his stranglehold over his people.”

Senator Bernie Sanders highlighted the irony of a nation recently the victim of domestic terrorism to now turn around and accuse Cuba of terrorist leanings: “This blatantly politicized designation” overlooks the fact that “domestic terrorism in the United States poses a far greater threat to Americans than Cuba does.”

Massachusetts Representative Jim McGovern did likewise: “Coming less than a week after a failed coup attempt at the hands of his own domestic terrorists, Donald Trump’s reckless and baseless decision is nothing more than a vindictive attempt to make it harder for President-elect Biden to clean up after the last four years of failure.” McGovern lamented Trump’s legacy “of inflicting unnecessary suffering and hardship on the Cuban people.”

Cuba’s Foreign Ministry responded at once, declaring that Cuba “rejects ... terrorism in all its forms ... by anybody, against anyone, and from wherever it’s committed.” The Ministry’s statement referred to “an arrogant act by a discredited, dishonest, and morally bankrupt

government.” It took note of 3,478 Cubans killed and 2,099 wounded by the U.S. government or by U. S. – based terrorists tolerated by that government.

Change may be in the wind. On December 17, the 6th anniversary of the announcement of Obama’s opening to Cuba, two foreign-policy advocacy groups, the Washington Office on Latin America and the Center for Democracy in the Americas, presented the Biden Administration with a joint proposal for re-engagement with Cuba.

The first steps would include: Biden personally inviting Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel to the Summit of the Americas to be hosted by the United States in late 2021, returning a U.S. ambassador to Havana, and restoring the diplomatic staff there.